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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: CHAVALIT REENTERS GOVERNMENT
WITH A PLAN, EXITS QUICKLY WITH EMPTY HANDS

REF: A. BANGKOK 2977 (AMBASSADOR - FORMER PM SAMAK)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2871 (PEACE TALKS IN INDONESIA)

[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2808 (MEDIATOR HAS GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS)

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (B, D)

Summary and comment:

[1](#)1. (S) Then-deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyuth told Ambassador on October 1 that his primary focus in returning to government was to bring resolution to the conflict in southern Thailand. He outlined an approach that focused on achieving buy-in from community representatives in the south at a planned October 11 meeting, establishing a limited peace zone to build confidence and trust, and aiming for greater cultural space and some form of self governance for the insurgency-affected provinces. Chavalit stated that his efforts were completely separate from an odd PULO-associated initiative sponsored by former Army Commander Chetta, recent talks hosted by Indonesian Vice President Kalla, or the secret dialogue facilitated by the Henri Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC). Chavalit resigned October 7, as a close aide predicted to us he would, claiming Chavalit felt undercut by PM Somchai and security officials.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Chavalit's southern plan appeared to have little support elsewhere in Bangkok. Ironically, the insurgents apparently feared Chavalit's initiative would have seriously undercut their support and cover within southern communities. While Chavalit brought welcomed political focus to the conflict in southern Thailand after seven months of neglect under former PM Samak, his plan suffered from a serious lack of support by Thai security forces. RTARF Supreme Commander General Songkitti Jaggabartra severely downplayed Chavalit's importance during an October 7 meeting with the Ambassador. End Summary and Comment

Chavalit,s Strategy: Dokmai lai sii

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador paid a courtesy call on the then-DPM Chavalit on Oct. 1 at his residence in suburban Bangkok. In describing his approach on the southern conflict, Chavalit

offered an alternative version to the standard centralized Thai identity based on nation, religion, and monarchy. He favored a policy of "dokmai lai sii," or Thailand as a flower of many colors, in this case, cultures. There were three conditions that could form the basis of a workable agreement: an understanding that the south was part of Thailand, not to be separated; establishing a policy of "Bumiputra," which Chavalit described as a concept of social conditions/Malay identity that Mahatir had promoted; and allowing the southern provinces some form of autonomy, under the Thai Constitution, similar to what Bangkok and Pattaya now enjoy - including some rights of self-taxation. (Note: Chavalit was not clear on how establishing a policy that favored one race/ethnicity such as "Bumiputra" would enable reconciliation. End note.)

14. (C) Chavalit said there would be a big meeting in southern Thailand October 11 that would include representatives from Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani provinces, along with 200 - 300 key leaders from the military, police, and civilian government and civil society - perhaps 3000 attendees in total. Chavalit had planned to go to watch and serve as honorary chair.

15. (C) A cornerstone of the efforts to be launched October 11 was a proposed peace zone of six districts, two each in Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani provinces, where there would be no insurgent violence for 30 days. In return, security forces would not initiate operations. During the first month, there would also be discussions of social and economic development for the region. If the confidence building measure succeeded, the plan would be extended to all three provinces the second month, aiming towards a general peace announcement by the King's birthday on December 5.

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16. (C) Chavalit told the Ambassador he had engaged PM Somchai on this approach September 30. Somchai had agreed that Chavalit should be in charge of the government's south policy, but thought it better if the government did not start the initiative. Chavalit said he insisted that there wasn't time; national interests dictated the need to move forward. Eventually, he said, Somchai agreed.

Lack of support, possible exit from government?

17. (C) Shortly after Ambassador's meeting with Chavalit, however, it became apparent that Chavalit enjoyed little support among key actors in Bangkok. A subsequent October 1 meeting between Chavalit and Army Commander Anupong did not go well, Chavalit's right hand man, MGEN (ret) Sornchai Montriwat told us October 2. According to Sornchai, when Chavalit laid out his "plan for peace," Anupong did not agree, indicating he favored a tougher approach to the situation. Deputy Principal Private Secretary Krit Garnjana-Gooncgorn was also dismissive of Chavalit's plans. In a conversation with the Ambassador late on October 1, he said there was no political support in Bangkok for Chavalit's efforts.

18. (C) RTARF Supreme Commander General Songkitti Jaggabartra was visibly dismissive of Chavalit's efforts to address the situation in the South in an October 7 meeting with Ambassador. Songkitti stated that PM Somchai had delegated authority for the South to General Anupong through the Army Commander's role as the Deputy Director of the Internal Security Operations Command. Anupong would continue to lead the government's activities in the South, while the Deputy PM would be free to contribute ideas. Songkitti maintained that Anupong's role was much more important, as he was responsible for coordinating the activities of the Army, the police, and other governmental agencies working through the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center and for implementing policy on the ground. Songkitti expressed confidence that the RTG would succeed in improving the situation in the South

through an integrated approach to the insurgency.

¶9. (S) Ironically, the insurgent field commanders behind most of the southern violence greatly feared Chavalit's initiative, according to Michael Vatikiotis, Southeast Asian representative for HDC, which acts as facilitator for secret talks between insurgents and Thai government representatives (ref c). Vatikiotis told us October 1 that the insurgents fear Chavalit could use his Wadah network and cooperation with Malaysian Special Branch police to undermine their political top cover among mid-level local leaders; Chavalit alone among Thai national politicians successfully understood the South, in their view (Chavalit had bragged to the Ambassador that he had kept in contact with all the key actors involved for 30 years). Vatikiotis also saw Anupong as taking an increasingly harder line towards the South, now that more accommodationist ex-PM Surayud had retreated from an active role. This had allowed more conservative army leaders associated with the Queen's Guard to reassert themselves and push Anupong back to his more natural position, in Vatikiotis' view.

¶10. (C) Chavalit aide Sornchai told us October 2 that Chavalit was discouraged by being undercut in his efforts on the south, and by the lack of seriousness in the rest of the cabinet. Sornchai lamented that Chavalit, as DPM, did not have standing to compel the Army to follow his lead; only the PM or Defense Minister did, but Somchai, who held both portfolios, was too weak to force the Army to follow Chavalit's policy leadership. Worse, Somchai had stated publicly that he as PM was in charge of dealing with the South, despite his private delegation of the matter to Chavalit.

Nature of insurgency groups, Malaysia connection?

¶11. (C) Chavalit claimed to the Ambassador that, there was a

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nine man Politburo representing BRN-C and four or five other organizations active in the South, controlling the ground actions by RKK and the United Front, with Spe-ing the overall coordinator. He claimed the BRN-C leaders stayed in Malaysia, and maintained contact with Malaysian Prime Minister Badawi and Defense Minister Najib, whom, he said, also knew them very well. Chavalit claimed Malaysian leaders did not want the insurgents to cause problems with Thailand and wanted them to lay down arms. However, they did not quite know what to do with them, beyond giving the insurgents a place to stay, and thus were able to exercise "some control" over them.

¶12. (S) Vatikiotis was doubtful that Chavalit's efforts would succeed on their own, particularly given the reality of a mass-based insurgency taking on a life of its own. The insurgents involved in the HDC-hosted talks admitted they could only control about 80 percent of the violence, and some of the Muslim on Buddhist attacks were occurring out of a professed hatred of Thais - a much stronger sentiment that had been in play previously. Vatikiotis mused that symbols mattered more than reality to both sides; he cited the freedom of Thai (Muslim Malay) Imams to deliver Friday sermons in the South without preclearance from security officials, and Yala Islamic College's open propagation of Wahhabist ideology, as greater cultural-religious space than existed across the border in Malaysia itself.

What was going on in Bogor? A second look

¶13. (C) Democratic Party MP Samai Chareonchang, the Muslim chairman of the House Standing Committee on Social Welfare and former Head of the Bangkok Islamic Committee, claimed to us during a POL-hosted iftar dinner September 25 that DPM Chavalit was behind the "peace talks" hosted by Indonesian VP

Kalla in Bogor, Indonesia September 20-21, an allegation we had heard previously (ref b). Samai claimed that the lead southern representative in the talks, Dot Wan, was a known long-time Chavalit associate via the Wadah political faction.

¶14. (S) In contrast, Chavalit claimed to Ambassador October 1 that the Bogor talks were "Samak's effort, along with Privy Councilor Palakorn," and involved a BRN-C figure, but "not someone in control." Noting multiple channels being opened "by my friends" to try to solve the problems in the South, he asserted that none were coordinated - Chetta's deal with a PULO element, the Bogor talks, his own initiative, or the HDC-hosted secret peace process (ref c).

¶15. (S) Jakarta-based HDC rep Vatikiotis told us October 1 that he believed the publicity and confusion surrounding the Bogor talks was the result of tension between the offices of the Indonesian President and Vice President. Presidential adviser Dino Djalal thought that the President, not Kalla, should take credit, and issued a preemptive press statement. Notwithstanding a pledge to the Thai parties involved to keep the talks low-key, Kalla then called in news agencies and cameras to record the session. Vatikiotis' key MFA contact, Desrah Pachaya, confessed to him later that the MFA had no idea what was going on. Pachaya told Vatikiotis that the Indonesians thought the Thai "government representative," retired General Kwanchart, represented a Deputy Prime Minister, but were not sure which one, and they did not realize Kwanchart was already retired. Vatikiotis told us that the insurgents involved in the HDC talks were irritated by free-lance efforts like Chetta's and at Bogor because the publicity confused their people on the ground in southern Thailand and led to internal second-guessing.

JOHN